

Bridge On The Bayou:

Tales from the 2023 North American Bridge Championships in New Orleans

By: Matt Weingarten, 2018 National Champion

The North American Bridge Championships also known as the NABCs might be my favorite time of year and probably a common feeling among bridge addicts. In addition to playing bridge at the highest level, a player gets to see many friends who one does not get to see on a regular basis due to location and residency differences. Yep, national tournaments are both social and competitive experiences, and that's what makes them so enjoyable.

The Spring NABC, which was just held in New Orleans, might be my favorite of the bunch because it has pair events galore, which are my preferred events. Not to mention that the tournament is usually held around the same time as my birthday, so it's multiple



Belated birthday dinner with friends one night after the games wrapped up!

celebrations in one.

Growing up in Florida, I had the opportunity to be exposed to NABCs when I started out in the Youth North American Bridge Championships (YNABCs). I'm so fortunate for those experiences. I mean, what's better than traveling to a city and getting together with friends while playing bridge? Sure, there's touristy things to do

as well, but I'm too much of a bridge degenerate to be bothered to do that. As long as, I sleep and eat, then I'm good at living in the hotel and/or convention center.

As this is a bridge article, it wouldn't be complete without some stories from the New Orleans NABC tournament. I started out by playing in the Platinum Pairs with my friend, Sam Amer. This event is generally considered to be the most intense of them all. Basically, the criterion for entry is so strict that to garner a spot a player needs to have at least 50 Platinum points in the last 9 tournaments or at least 200 total platinum points. As platinum points can only be earned in the biggest national events, the field thins out quite quickly.

Sam and I just missed out on qualifying for the 2nd day. In retrospect, arriving at the host hotel 3 hours before game time, on 1 hour of sleep was probably not the best strategy. Next event, my partner, Clerk Shaw and I made it through day one of the IMP Pairs, which is a bit of a crazy event because of "field variance" or what is understood as having a diversity of skill levels playing. I also played with friends in several random events while the Mixed Pairs was going on, as my original plans had fallen through for that event.



Matt with teammates Nikki Hudak and Ben Levine and partner, Clerk Shaw after a Swiss event one

The real fun began with the Silodor Pairs, a two-day open pairs event that featured a lot of world-class players. There were a multitude of upsets in the Vanderbilt Knockout, which always attracts the best teams in the world. As a result, all those players ended up in the Silodor Pairs. Playing with Sam, we qualified for the second day. Our first round was okay but our carryover wasn't high. However, we managed to jump up the leaderboard quickly with two strong sessions, finishing 12th. We certainly had some luck along the way, such as this hand:

Dir: N				1
Vul: None		♠ 7		
		♥ 7 3		
7		♦ K 8 5 3		
8 4		♣ K J 10 9 6 3		
21				
♠ 9 8 6 5 3 2		♠ Q 10 4		
♥ —		♥ J 10 9 6 2		
♦ A Q 9 6 2		♦ J 7 4		
♣ Q 5		♣ 8 4		
		♠ A K J		
		♥ A K Q 8 5 4		
		♦ 10		
		♣ A 7 2		

Sitting N, Sam opened 3C. For some reason, I didn't respond with a forcing 3H bid and I just jumped straight into keycard by bidding 4D. After hearing my partner show 1 keycard (without the Q), I took a gamble and bid 6C. The defense failed to lead a H, which beats the contract immediately by a ruffing a heart and cashing the Ace. We managed to rack up 12 tricks as a result and a really good board. While we totally belong in 6H, it can't be made with the poor split, and we were rewarded for our gamble. It was that type of day for us.

The final event of the tournament was the Fast Pairs. In this event, you only have 11 minutes to play 2 boards. For those who play on BBO, this pace will feel familiar. I ended up playing with a friend from Seattle, Sriram Ganesan. We finished 23rd, a respectable result, although we botched a few hands.

Just like that, the tournament was over. Those 10 days went by very quickly! It was a great time as usual. Hopefully, you will attend one of the major ACBL bridge tournaments and test your skills against some of the best in the world as well as make lifelong friends in the process.

Best of luck in all your bridge adventures!